DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 511 HE 025 378

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TITLE Multiculturalism in Higher Education: A Myth or Reality?
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Multicultural Fair (Chattanooga, TN, February 6, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affirmative Action; *Change Strategies; College Curriculum; *Cultural Pluralism; Educational Environment; *Higher Education; Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; Nontraditional Students; Postsecondary Education; *Racial Attitudes; *Racial Bias; Racial Relations; Student Subcultures
IDENTIFIERS *Diversity (Student)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the realities of multiculturalism in America's higher education and presents strategies for enhancing multiculturalism on college and university campuses. It examines what multiculturalism is and lists the various myths about it that have permeated the academic community. In response to these myths, solutions are examined that cover the following areas: (1) responding to affirmative action regulations; (2) providing funds; (3) broadening curricula; (4) redirecting testing and instruction; and (5) dealing with the problem of educational institutions not reaching out to minorities. It is noted that higher education has failed in its ability to respond to basic needs of nontraditional at-risk students, but also mentions that it is difficult to use traditional strategies to work with nontraditional students. Eight nontraditional strategies are identified to assist predominately white colleges to foster multiculturalism on their campuses. Finally, it is suggested that because of the fewer numbers of minority administrators, faculty, staff, and students in predominately white colleges and universities, that these institutions should continuously reassess and reevaluate their recruitment, retention, and graduation policies. Contains 33 references. (GLR)

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Multiculturalism in Higher Education: A Myth or Reality?

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Paper presented at the Multicultural Fair, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Tennessee, February 6, 1992.

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Abstract

Multiculturalism has continued to be a misrepresented reality in America's higher education. This misrepresentation is evident in the traditional ways used by some predominately white colleges and universities to respond to issues of quality and equity. Traditional methods of responding to multiculturalism have been ineffective in preparing students for cultural acceptance and racial harmony. Nontraditional methods of recruiting, retaining, instructing and preparing minorities appears to reduce early and late attrition from colleges. Quality and equity are achieved when different peoples work together in the college environment. Unfortunately, this sense of direction is not pursued realistically in higher education. This leaves one to wonder if multiculturalism is a myth or reality. In this paper, the author discusses the realities of multiculturalism in America's higher education. In addition, he presents strategies for enhancing multiculturalism on college and university campuses.

Multiculturalism in Higher Education: A Myth or Reality?

> "Diversity is challenging, but those of us who have seen the alternative know it is the richer, livelier and ultimate form" (Ehrenreich, 1991, p. 84).

Multiculturalism has continued to be a misrepresented reality in higher education. This gross misunderstanding is apparent in (a) recent educational reforms which have emphasized higher test scores and quality and less on equity and common sense approaches that work, (b) recent attacks on affirmative action regulations without suggesting other ways to include minorities in higher education, and (c) recent attacks on the civil rights law as a quota bill without suggesting how racial and ethnic injustices can be eradicated in America. One would expect America's higher education not to respond to these counterproductive measures. Ironically, it has been the most vulnerable. It is becoming increasingly clear that litigations and legislations promulgated to regulate and protect public welfare have been unable to promote public welfare. The emphasis has been on restructuring America's schools rather than on restructuring schooling. The commitment is lacking, and the sense of urgency is downplayed. Sadly enough, educators and administrators have become victims of educational reforms (Cuban, 1990; Kauffman, Kameenui, Birman, & Danielson, 1990). Some critical questions come to mind at this juncture. Is it really possible for higher education to ignore societal realities in its attempt to please the status quo? Should higher education not be

concerned about the kind of monocultural education that it is providing students? Is it not clear that the one-sided education provided by higher education divorces students from realities of life? Can higher education afford to continue the enhancement of ignorance which it purports to destroy? These critical questions will combine to haunt America's higher education until it responds to multiculturalism and multiethnicity in recruitment, retention, instruction, programming and policies. This paper discusses realities and myths of multiculturalism, and presents strategies for realistically promoting multiculturalism.

What is Multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism and multiethnicity are synonymous. Multiculturalism is not Afrocentrism –- Afrocentrism is indeed a part of multiculturalism. Why are individuals afraid of learning about other cultures even though it is an axiom that human beings are different inter-individually and intra-individually? How sensible is it to educate individuals on how to survive in a divergent society without considering their styles, cultures, symbols, languages, values and histories? Banks (1977, 1981, 1991); Gay (1981); Hilliard (1975, 1989, 1991); Newton (1992); Parekh (1986) and Ross (1991) agreed that multiculturalism will perpetuate freedom and reduce racism. Multiculturalism suggests that cultural diversity is an important part of American life. Put another way, it is an antidote to the traditional Eurocentric curriculum which has tended to (a) denigrate other cultures by

using quality as an alibi, and (b) rely on higher test scores to continue the unrealistic concept of biological determinism (Obiakor, 1991). Consequently, multiculturalism corrects the miseducation of students and provides them with the total life experience. It advocates inclusion rather than exclusion both in curriculum and manpower. In specific terms, multiculturalism enhances the self- knowledge, self-esteem and self-ideal of students and faculty. Logically, when individuals feel good, the society feels good, and the nation feels good.

Realities or Myths of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is not a myth. It is even more real in this day and age. Mendenhall (1991) argued that "the more everyone in a group knows and understands the same set of social values, the less interpersonal problems will result between group members" (p. D7). In a similar argument, Ross (1991) suggested that:

> The way that the demographics are rapidly changing, Whites are going to be in the minority within the next ten years. Thus, it would behoove those that are ignorant and not receptive to other cultures to strive to be open-minded and accepting of people and their differences, so that we can all live in harmony. (p. A4)

The changing demography identified by Ross will eventually affect the work force. As Mendenhall pointed out, "in many parts of the United States it is a reality --- and it is predicted that by the year 2010 it will be a reality for the entire American work place" (p. D7). The question then is: How is

America's higher education prepared to respond to these challenges? Many have argued that multiculturalism cannot be ignored as long as educational and economic disparities exist. As Price (1991) indicated:

> I wonder, frankly, how we can bemoan the phenomena of tribalization and multiculturalism in our society if we are doing so little to eliminate the economic and educational disparities which fuel them. The appropriate antidote for increased separatism is a culture of inclusiveness which would infuse every facet of our society. To my mind, the blame for balkanization rests more with those who have the power to include but won't, and less with those on the outside who are barred entry. (p. 8)

A myriad of flimsy excuses has been used to water down the impact of multiculturalism in higher education. A few of them are listed below:

1. Minority students must understand that this is America.
2. We cannot find qualified minority students for academic scholarships.
3. We cannot find qualified minority faculty for recruitment.
4. It is a preferential treatment to adopt policies to retain minority faculty.
5. Multicultural curriculum is expensive.
6. Multicultural curriculum is useless because there are few minority students.
7. Multiculturalism is not necessary because racism does not exist anymore.
8. Affirmative action regulations are unfair to the majority of the

people in the university.

9. Changes in higher education should be gradual.
10. Advocates of multiculturalism want to lower the quality of education.

The above statements are myths that have permeated the academic community. The reality is that they create problems for administrators. faculty, staff and students of colleges and universities. How, then, can multiculturalism be infused in higher education?

Infusing Multiculturalism in Higher Education

It is grossly naive to assume that America's higher education has not responded at all to multiculturalism. The question is, what has really resulted from higher education's response to multiculturalism? There are indications that the response has been ineffective in dealing with socio-economic, political and cultural needs of America's peoples. The response has been traditional and unidimensional, and solutions have been almost band-aid in nature. Since multiculturalism is not a myth, real solutions are needed. These solutions are fully explained in this section.

Responding to Affirmative Action Regulations

Affirmative action regulations have tended to enhance inclusiveness and quality. This means that recruitment and retention of minority staff, faculty and students should become a matter of priority. University administrators need to review the high attrition rate of minorities in their

institutions. They need to be concerned when minority students drop out of their colleges. The "business- as-usual" mentality promotes the old-boy network and leaves the status quo unnecessarily unchallenged. Disrupting the equilibrium should be a part of the responsibility of America's higher education.

Should regulations enable higher education to protect public welfare or promote public welfare? It appears that America's higher education has been stubborn in responding to public welfare in the way it did in the 1960s. Affirmative action regulations have been excessively politicized . According to Harvey and Scott-Jones (1985):

> Although institutions pay lip service to affirmative action, and individual instances of successful Black faculty members exist, Blacks remain severely underrepresented on predominantly White college and university faculties. Even as the number of Ph.D.s awarded to Blacks has increased, many searches for new faculty still conclude with a thoroughly remorseful committee chair explaining that the position is not being offered to a Black person because, 'We couldn't find any.' (p. 68)

It is erroneous to assume that all minority group members sanction government regulations, especially when they do not foster quality. Minority scholars (Loury, 1985; and Williams, 1990) have resented affirmative action regulations because of their negative impact on minorities. It is unfortunate that all minority group members are categorized as individuals who have less respect for quality. Again, this depicts ignorance and a lack of concern for the concept of individual differences. It is absolutely important that (a)

white students understand that many minorities favor quality education, and (b) minorities have top scholars who are sometimes more competent than their white counterparts. Multiculturalism plays an important role here –- it affords the unique opportunity for white students to be educated by (and with) minorities.

Providing Funds

Funds should be made available to minority students in higher education to foster retention. It is important to remember that the majority of these students come from either low or middle income homes. Scholarships, grants and college work study programs should be provided to those minority students who need them. Community businesses should respond to the needy in their respective environments.

More money does not however mean better programs. This means that efforts should be made to monitor who receives funds, why people receive funds and what financial options are available to students. Minority students are sometimes unaware of available resources in predominately white colleges and universities. The outrageous excuse in some quarters is that there is money but there is no qualified student. There are always qualified minority students. Feelings of alienation create early attrition for many minority students (Obiakor & Lassiter, 1986).

Broadening Curricula

The demand for broadening the curriculum in higher education is not

new. The challenge today is one including those elements of curricula that touch on all facets of the society. There should be compulsory or generally required courses that address divergent aspects of ethnicity and culture of peoples of America and the world. Thomas and Alawiye (1990) decried the non-representation of achievements of minority members of the society in the literature. They wrote:

> Our examination of selected elementary textbooks, grades 1 to 6 disclosed that the historical background and cultural contributions of slaves in early America are ignored. In particular, the art, architecture, literature, and music contributed by West Africans during their enslavement in the American South are excluded. (p. 2)

The implication of Thomas and Alawiye's statement is that some of the texts used in classes have by error or design excluded achievements of some of America's peoples. Will this not result in miseducation of the general populace? Will this not result in the lack of knowledge about other people's capability? Newton (1992) concluded that "until we realize that there are differences in our cultures and that we must acknowledge our differences and learn from those, racism will prevail" (p. A4).

Redirecting Testing and Instruction

There is no doubt that testing and instruction are two unavoidable elements in academic activities. The U. S. Department of Education (1991) in its book, America 2000: An education strategy had mapped out six National Education Goals "to jump start a new generation of American

schools, transforming a 'Nation at Risk' into a 'Nation of Students' " (p. 56). With all its good intentions, "Education 2000" has a fundamental flaw, i.e. excessive reliance on national testing. Tests should provide clues not solutions.

Tests have been one measure of quality that has been despised by many minorities in the educational process. Environmental factors (such as nutrition, self-concept, motivation, anxiety, examiner race, test sophistication, and language) have been found to affect academic and test performance (Gould, 1981; Hilliard, 1975, 1989; Obiakor & Alawiye, 1990; Ogbu, 1987, 1988, 1990; Samuda, 1975). Many tests produce reliable or consistent results even when they do not measure what they purport to measure. Minority students are likely to differ inter-individually and intra-individually just like their white counterparts in test-taking skills (Minton & Schneider, 1980). It is counterproductive to test and place minority students using tests that have been standardized with the ethnocentric, white, middle class sample. Anrig (1985) warned that "excellence must not become the new code word for a retreat from equity, just when the struggles of recent years are beginning to pay dividends" (p. 623).

The use of adequate scores in the National Teacher Examination (NTE) for a gainful employment as a teacher has created tremendous problems for many minority student-teachers. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (1987) reported that the number of

minorities in teacher education is small when compared to the number of minority group children in public schools. The AACTE (1987) report exposed the 1987 survey of the National Education Association which provided the following discouraging data:

1. Blacks represent 16.2% of the children in public schools, but only 6.9% of the teachers.
2. Hispanics represent 9.1% of the children in public schools, but only 1.9% of the teachers.
3. Asian/Pacific Islanders represent 2.5% of the children in public schools, but only 0.9% of the teachers.
4. American Indians/Alaskan Natives represent 0.9% of the children in public schools, but only 0.6% of the teachers.

What challenges face professors when teaching minority students in mainstreamed university classes? It is important that educators foster a pluralistic society through multiethnic education in their classrooms (Banks, 1977, 1986; Gay, 1981). As a matter of urgency, college professors should acknowledge (a) historical backgrounds of their minority students, (b) languages and symbols that minority students bring to class, (c) behavioral patterns of minority students, (d) cultural beliefs of minority students, and (e) events which have molded minority group members. The complex web of informal rules and processes should be eradicated to increase academic opportunities, choices and achievements. Minority students can compete

and excel in university programs --- they need sensitivity and understanding.

Understanding Milieu and Expectations

Many predominately white colleges and universities do not reach out to their minority communities. These institutions tend to appeal to the politics of exclusiveness; and sometimes forget that they are a part of their respective communities. Some members of these institutions regard minorities as unqualified persons imposed on them because of their race, color, ethnicity, gender or national origin (Obiakor, 1991). The reality is that this lack of understanding leads to bigotry and racism. As Banks (1977) pointed out:

> ... We live in a world society beset with momentous social and human problems, many of which are related to ethnic hostility and conflict. Effective solutions to these critical problems can be found only by an active, compassionate, and ethnically sensitive citizenry capable of making sound decision that will benefit our ethnically diverse world community. (p. 32)

On the other hand, members of minority communities need to understand the university milieu and expectations. Complacency has become the order of the day in many minority communities. In his television appearance at Tony Brown's Journal, Perkins (1988) urged especially African-Americans to engage in self-help projects by citing the famous Lao Tzu's quotation which states "Give me a fish and I will eat for today; teach me to fish and I will eat for the rest of my life." Minority communities cannot (and should not) expect higher education to respond to all their needs. They need to be very involved. They need to participate in the college education

of members of their respective communities. For example, nothing prevents these communities from establishing foundations, endowments and scholarship programs to serve their constituencies. Qualls-Brooks (1989) urged that:

> It is incumbent and even imperative on those of us who enjoy these freedoms to continuously fight that they will continue and that all Americans have the opportunity to live and experience every freedom in this country—real and implied. (p. 2A)

Adopting Nontraditional Strategies

Higher education has failed in its ability to respond to basic needs of nontraditional at-risk students. Most minority students are nontraditional students. It is difficult to use traditional strategies to work with nontraditional students. Nontraditional strategies should be used to respond to (a) affirmative action regulations, (b) educational finance, (c) curricula, (d) tests and instruction, and (e) expectations. Richardson (1989) identified eight nontraditional strategies that will assist predominately white colleges to foster multiculturalism on their respective campuses. They are:

1. Early intervention in public schools to strengthen preparation and improve students' educational planning.
2. Summer "bridge" programs to accustom minority students to college-level coursework and the campus atmosphere before they begin college.
3. Special orientation programs and help with choice of courses and registration.
4. Tailored financial-aid programs, including policies that recognize students who may not be able to contribute as much in summer earnings to their aid packages if they participate in bridge programs.
5. Strong academic-assessment programs, coupled with courses

designed to offset gaps in preparations.
6. Adequate tutoring services, learning laboratories, and organized "mentoring" programs.
7. Intrusive academic advising to guide selection of courses and to intervene before small problems become major.
8. Career guidance to translate nonspecific educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked. (A48)

Perspective

Different reports and studies have revealed fewer numbers of minority administrators, faculty, staff and students in predominately white colleges and universities. The inclusion of minorities in education, economics, politics, and society has become a matter of public priority. Quality, equity and expectations in American education need to be enhanced through systematic networking of all communities. White institutions should continuously reassess and reevaluate their recruitment, retention and graduation policies. Education should not be viewed simplistically as a white peoples' prerogative – it should be associated with democracy and "real" freedom for all Americans.

To sum up, America's higher education should be ready to respond to present challenges. The widespread notion that America is a "color-blind society" is a myth. Racism continues to be a threat on college and university campuses. The rat race for educational reform is <u>not</u> the answer. The answer lies within the realistic intent of higher education to attack the cancer called racism. This attack will only be successful when multiculturalism is practicalized in America's higher education.

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